STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

The Diplomat's Shield: Diplomatic Security in Today's World

Hearing

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Today's hearing – *The Diplomat's Shield: Diplomatic Security in Today's World* – will examine the results of a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) review of the Department of State's Diplomatic Security Bureau (DS), which provides security for the State Department worldwide so our diplomats can advance U.S. interests.

Since the terrorist bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, and the terrorist attacks of 9-11, Diplomatic Security's responsibilities have grown and evolved. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan further increased the challenges of keeping our diplomats safe. Last week, President Obama announced his new Afghanistan strategy. Thirty-thousand U.S. troops will deploy in support of this effort. Secretary of State Clinton stated that the number of civilians in Afghanistan will triple by early next year. DS must be fully prepared to support an even greater role in protecting our civilians.

Over the last decade, DS's budget has increased almost ten-fold to about \$2 billion and its direct-hire staff has doubled. Unfortunately these extra resources have not guaranteed DS's readiness.

In particular, I have concerns in three areas that I hope will be addressed today.

First, the State Department must address ongoing staffing challenges. GAO identified key workforce gaps that hinder DS in carrying out its duties. Less than half of Regional Security Officers serving in language designated positions meet their proficiency requirements. More than one third of Diplomatic Security positions are filled by officers below the appropriate grade. And, there are personnel gaps at domestic offices and at key posts overseas. I believe that DS should invest more in its workforce by having enough people with the experience and language skills necessary to fully support its critical missions.

Understaffing leads to over-reliance on contractors. GAO found that there are 36,000 contractors at work in DS, which is about 90 percent of Diplomatic Security's total workforce. According to GAO, some DS employees are not prepared to manage this large contractor workforce. Recent security lapses at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul have illustrated the need for better contractor oversight.

Second, the State Department must better manage the tension between fulfilling its diplomatic operations and providing strong security. Today, State Department employees serve in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other posts where they would have previously been required to evacuate. These diplomatic operations are critical to U.S. interests, but providing security for such dangerous missions places a great burden on DS.

Because of these dangers, some of our overseas posts resemble fortresses, and for security reasons, may not be in locations considered most appropriate and accessible for diplomatic operations. GAO reported that some diplomats are concerned that security measures make it more difficult for visitors to attend U.S. embassy events, making person-to-person engagement less likely. We must be mindful that the way our diplomatic presence is seen and felt in other countries may reinforce or undermine our broader diplomatic goals.

It is certainly critical that the U.S. protect its personnel from threats, both on and off post. Security, however, must be carried out in concert with our diplomatic mission.

Finally, I want to emphasize the need for improved strategic planning efforts within DS. I support GAO's recommendation for the State Department to conduct a strategic review of Diplomatic Security. The Department has already stated that DS will benefit from the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. I am looking forward to hearing more about this from our State Department witness and how strategic planning for DS can become a part of its culture.